

Message Text

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17-12

ACTION EA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9084

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 12650

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, RP

SUBJECT: MARCOS MOVES TO STRENGTHEN LEGITIMACY

REF: MANILA'S A-301, NOV 9 1973

SUMMARY: MARCOS MAY CALL NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IN MID-DECEMBER TO ELECT HIM PRIME MINISTER. PROPOSED ACTION REFLECTIVE GOP CONCERN OVER ITS ILLGITIMACY AS DEC 30 APPROACHES, AND IS PART OF COMPREHENSIVE CAMPAIGN TO STILL ANY REMAINING DOUBTS. KICKOFF TO CALLING OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MAY HAVE BEEN SIGNALLED BY GOP DECISION NOV 8 TO CURTAIL ALL CLASSES GREATER MANILA AREA FROM NOV 12 TO JAN 2. ALTHOUGH EMBASSY DOES NOT DETECT MAJOR SIGNS OF UNREST, GOP OBVIOUSLY NERVOUS OVER THAI REVOLT, CIRCULATION UNDERGROUND LETTERS AND PROPAGANDA ACTIVITIES OF FIL-AMERICANS. END SUMMARY.

1. EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT MARCOS MAY BE CONSIDERING CALLING NATIONAL ASSEMBLY TO INSTALL HIMSELF AS PRIME MINISTER. AS REPORTED IN REF AIRGRAM, GOVERNMENT HAS SHOWN ITSELF INCREASINGLY SENSITIVE TO QUESTION OF ITS LEGITIMACY AND HAS INAUGURATED RATHER COMPREHENSIVE EFFORT TO STILL ANY DOUBTS THAT REGIME IS LEGITIMATE PRIOR TO DEC 30. INSTALLATION OF PRESIDENT AS PRIME MINISTER PRESUMABLY REGARDED AS FINAL MEASURE.

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2. RUMORS OF POSSIBLE PRESIDENTIAL ACTION HAVE BEEN CIRCULATING IN MANILA WITH INCREASING FREQUENCY THAT PRESIDENT SEEKING CONVINCING MEANS OF ESTABLISHING LEGITIMACY OF HIS REGIME RUMORS HAVE RANGED FROM REFERENDA TO DECREE TO CALLING OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. IN RECENT DISCUSSION WITH AMBASSADOR, SEVERAL SUPREME COURT JUDGES INDICATED THAT ONLY WAY PRESIDENT COULD LEGITIMATELY BECOME PRIME MINISTER WOULD BE BY COMPLIANCE WITH ARTICLE IX NEW CONSTITUTION CALLING FOR ELECTION BY MEMBERS OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. EMBASSY HAS NOW RECEIVED SEVERAL REPORTS THAT DECISION WAS MADE TWO DAYS AGO TO CALL NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IN MID-DECEMBER AT WHICH MACAPAGAL WOULD BE ELECTED PRESIDENT, MARCOS WOULD BE ELECTED PRIME MINISTER AND FORMER SENATOR TOLentino WOULD BE ELECTED SPEAKER OF HOUSE. FOLLOWING ELECTION OF PRIME MINISTER, ASSEMBLY WOULD THEN BE DISSOLVED. THIS WOULD APPEAR TO BE RIGHT ORDER OF STEPS TO BE TAKEN BY GOVERNMENT. ONE REPORT ALSO SUGGESTED THAT MRS. MARCOS MAY BE PROCLAIMED IN REFERENDUM TO BE HELD IN JANUARY AS VICE PRESIDENT. SINCE THIS REPORT IS FROM MRS. MARCOS' SIDE OF THE FAMILY, THIS IS MORE SUSPECT, ALTHOUGH IT UNDOUBTEDLY REFLECTS EFFORTS OF MRS. MARCOS IN THAT DIRECTION.

3. FIRST PUBLIC STEP TO PREPARE WAY FOR CALLING OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN TAKEN YESTERDAY WITH DECISION TO CURTAIL UNIVERSITY CLASSES IN GREATER MANILA AREA ONLY FROM NOV 12 TO JAN 2. ALTHOUGH CABINET DECISION WAS TO CURTAIL UNIVERSITY CLASSES, PRESIDENT SUBSEQUENTLY EXTENDED ORDER TO INCLUDE ALL LEVELS IN APPARENT MOVE TO AVOID APPEARANCE OF SINGLING OUT UNIVERSITY STUDENTS. FURTHER AND MORE TOPICAL CAMOUFLAGE WAS PROVIDED BY FACT THAT CURTAILMENT OF CLASSES IN GREATER MANILA AREA WAS LISTED AS ONE OF MANY STEPS THAT GOVERNMENT WAS TAKING IN ORDER TO COPE WITH FUEL CRISIS.

4. REALITY OF STEPS INDICATED ABOVE IS DIFFICULT TO ASSESS AT THIS TIME. MOUNTING CONCERN DEMONSTRATED BY GOVERNMENT OVER APPROACH OF DEC 30 AND ITS VERY OBVIOUS DESIRE TO RESOLVE QUESTION OF LEGITIMACY WOULD MAKE CALLING OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY A REASONABLE STEP. WHILE EMBASSY CONFIDENTIAL

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DOES NOT PERCEIVE ANY SERIOUS GROUNDSWELL ON PART OF FILIPINOS, UNDERGROUND LETTERS HAVE BEEN CIRCULATED MORE RAPIDLY IN PAST FEW WEEKS ON THIS SUBJECT, THEY ARE BEING READ BY THE GOVERNMENT AND, COMBINED WITH GOVERNMENT SENSITIVITY TO ACTIVITIES OF FILIPINOS IN US, AND FRIGHT AT THAILAND EVENTS, HAS APPARENTLY CREATED SENSE OF URGENCY ON GOVERNMENT'S PART. EMBASSY WILL, OF COURSE, KEEP EAR TO GROUND FOR ANY FURTHER RUMBLINGS.

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